

Fifteen Minutes. Pages 12-19

Fifteen Minutes

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READING TIP

Make comparisons

Sometimes decisions need to be made in a hurry. What do you do when you have to make a quick decision? The character in this story has 15 minutes to make a decision. As you read, compare his decision-making process with yours.

“You’ve got fifteen minutes to make up your mind,” Mom said. She put the red toothbrush and the green toothbrush on the table, side by side. “If you haven’t decided by the time Violet gets here, I’ll do the deciding.”

My old toothbrush had been yellow, and its bristles were soft and bent. These two looked pretty good. Maybe the red would be best. I sat down at the table and studied them.

Two minutes later Violet Deever walked in, big smile on her face like she owned the world.

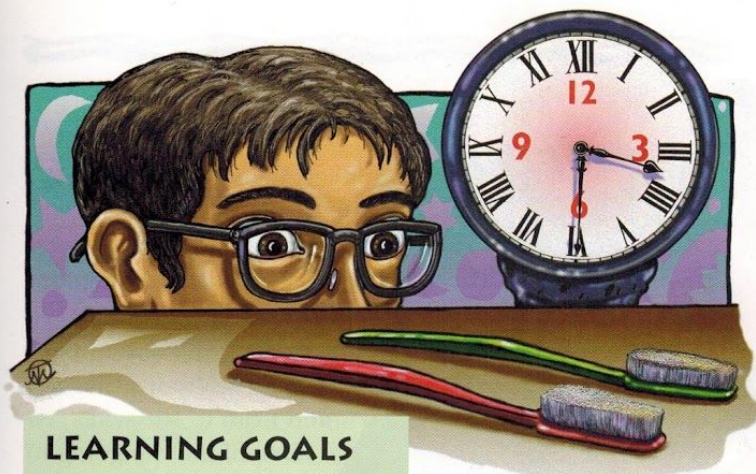
“What’re you doing?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

She saw the toothbrushes on the table. She reached for one, but I pushed her hand away.

“Pat, stop that,” she said. “I asked your mother to buy me a toothbrush. One of those is mine.”

Mom heard her and shouted from the kitchen that I had asked first so I had first choice.



LEARNING GOALS

You will

- read a story about a boy who has 15 minutes to make a decision
- make comparisons between this story and your decision-making experiences

“Twelve minutes left to decide, Pat.”

“Oh,” said Deever. She sat down on the other side of the table and studied the toothbrushes.

“They’re both nice, aren’t they?” she asked. “You know which one you’re going to take yet?”

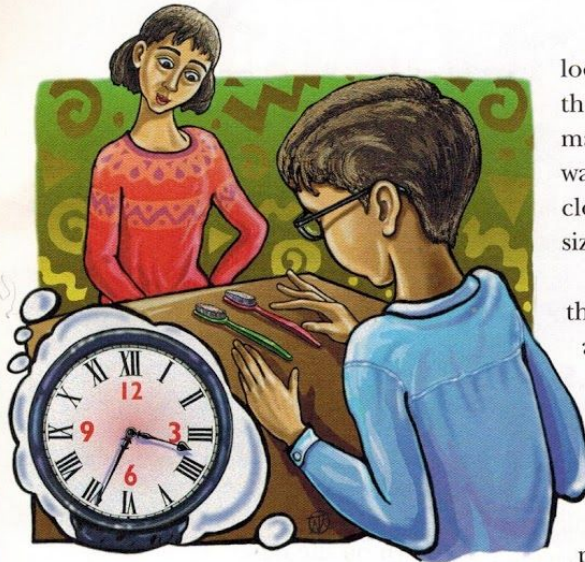
“Whichever one I want,” I said. I wasn’t going to have her trying to make me take the one *she* didn’t want.

“Maybe you ought to take the red one,” she said, touching the end of the red handle. “It’s very nice. The bristles look very straight.”

Then a sly look crossed her face and I knew she was playing one of her games again. She was going to try and trick me. Well, this time I wasn’t going to be tricked. This time I would do the tricking.

“Deever, don’t touch them. Mom said I had first choice, and that means first touching, too.”

I looked closely at the green one. If she wanted me to take the red one, she must’ve seen something special about the green one. Or maybe she just liked the colour best.



The green one looked a little bit longer than the red one. But maybe it was just where I was sitting. I moved them closer together to compare size.

"It doesn't seem right that you can touch them and I can't," she said.

"One of them is going to be mine, isn't it? Well, I don't want you touching my toothbrush. A toothbrush is a very personal thing, Pat. People

don't go around touching other people's toothbrushes."

All her talk was getting in the way of my deciding which one I wanted.

"Mom, make Violet stop talking. I can't think when she is talking."

Deever looked at her wristwatch. "You've got only ten more minutes to decide, Pat."

Now she was really trying to get me confused.

"I haven't really decided yet, but I think that I might just take the green one," I said.

The expression on her face didn't change a whit. Not an eyelid flickered. She stared me in the eye, daring me to guess what she was thinking.

"You have nine minutes left, Pat," she said.

But I wasn't going to be rushed into anything. I stood up and went to the kitchen for a glass of water. Mom was slicing tomatoes and cucumbers and celery for a salad.

"Mom, do I *have* to decide in fifteen minutes?"



“Decide about what, dear?”

“Aw, Mom. You know. The toothbrush. Violet is sitting right there, trying to get me to take the one she doesn’t want.”

Now Mom was washing lettuce at the sink.

“I can’t see what difference the colour of a toothbrush makes, Pat. Just pick one and be done with it.”

But she didn’t understand. I went back into the dining room. And I saw right away that Deever had moved both brushes. The green one had been closest to where I was sitting. Now the red one was closest.

“A fly lit on it,” she said.

“What?”

“I wouldn’t take the green one if I were you, Pat. While you were gone a fly lit on it. Maybe it laid some eggs. How would you like brushing your teeth with a bunch of fly eggs?”

“I’m not listening to that kind of stuff, Deever. I’m picking the one I want. Not the one you *don’t* want.”

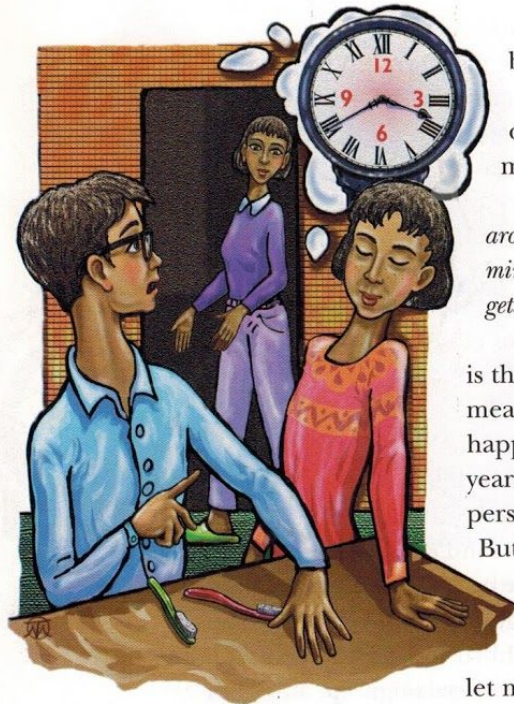
“Know what colour fly eggs are, Pat?”

I was looking at the toothbrushes. The bristles of both were snowy white. It looked like there might be a fleck of something on the bristles of the green one, but it surely wasn’t fly eggs. Maybe dust is all.

“They are green. That’s what colour fly eggs are.”

I flicked the bristles of the green toothbrush with my finger and whatever was on them disappeared. But if I took the green one, I would wash it with scalding water anyway.

I’d already wasted more than half of my time and I still didn’t know which one I wanted. I like red. It’s a bright, kind of loud colour. I wouldn’t want red clothes, except maybe a tie. Dad’s got a red sport coat that he wore one time only, and then swore he would never wear again because everybody kept making jokes about it. But a toothbrush is different. I never heard a toothbrush joke in my whole life.



“Pat, have you ever broken a tooth?” asked Deever. I was just getting started on my thinking and she got me distracted again.

Mom’s not going to fool around. At the end of the fifteen minutes, she’s going to decide who gets what colour.

“The reason I asked, Pat, is that when you break a tooth, it means a friend will die. I had that happen to me when I was only six years old. It wasn’t exactly a person-friend. It was a hamster. But it broke my heart. You know what my hamster’s name was, Pat?”

“Deever, will you please let me think?”

She says I ought to take the red one. She knows I’m not going to take the one she wants me to. That means she knows I’ll take the green one. And that means she wants the red one. If she just keeps quiet a little bit longer, I’ll have this thing puzzled out.

“Red is a very lucky colour, Pat. Did you know it can even help you if you have a poor memory? All you have to do is tie a red string around a finger on your left hand—”

“And remember why you tied it there,” I snarled. She just wouldn’t shut up.

“Mom, what time is it?”

“You have five minutes left, Pat,” said Deever. “You are surely taking a long time to make up your mind.”

She got up and went into the kitchen. I could hear low voices and laughter. Then she came back, crunching on a celery stick.

She says I should take the red one. But she also knows I won't do it, because she is telling me to do it. But if I'm smart enough to figure that out, then I'll take the red one, and she'll be left with the green one.

Suppose she's figured out that I'll figure it out. Which one does she really want, then?

I was getting confused.

I looked at her. She was still chewing on the celery. Was she trying to say something to me with that green stick? She smiled at me, still chewing.


Maybe I ought to get back to thinking about which one I want, instead of which one she wants. The green one is pretty. Kind of a grass green. I've got to get that business about fly eggs out of my mind. That's just trickery.

Lots of nice-looking things are green. Lawns are green. Leaves are green. Olives. Emeralds. Watermelons. Watermelons.

But the sweet part on the inside is red.

"Do you know anything about rotten garbage, Pat? It's ugly and slimy and probably full of fly eggs. Did I ever tell you that once I had a possum for a pet? Possums eat garbage. Did you know that? And they have funny green stuff growing all over their teeth."





I used to like brushing my teeth. Made them feel clean. And I like the taste of toothpaste. They put something in it that tickles your tongue. Sometimes when we run out of toothpaste, I brush with salt, and I even like the taste of that. But I wasn't looking forward to brushing my teeth ever again.

"What time do you think it is, Pat?" she asked.

"All right, Deever. Which one do you *really* want?"

"Oh, I don't have a real preference. I just thought the red one would be nice for you."

I balled my fist. I knew she wasn't going to tell me the truth.

"You're just saying that, right? I'll take the red one, and then you will get the green one, which is the one you really want. I know what you're trying to do, Deever."

She tilted her head, lifted her eyebrows, and kind of sniffed, like she was saying I had a right to my opinion even if I was wrong.

"I'll be back in two minutes," Mom said.

I whirled on Deever. I wanted to yell at her to go away, but she wasn't smiling like she was winning the war or anything. There was a kind of hurt look on her face.

"I thought I had been helping you, Pat," she said.

"Deever, a guy doesn't need help to pick the right colour for a toothbrush."

"All right, then. I won't say another word." She sat back in her chair and looked at me. The hurt look stayed on her face. Now she was trying to make me feel guilty.

"One minute!" called Mom.

Which one? Red one? Green one? Ruby one? Emerald one? Somehow I knew she wanted the red one. I just knew it.

I could hear Mom stirring around in the kitchen. She was going to come marching out here any second.

“All right. I’ve decided,”
I said.

I stretched my hand out
over the toothbrushes. I paused
over the red one and looked
at Deever’s face, but I
couldn’t tell a thing. Then I
moved my hand over the
green one. Still nothing.

I scooped my hand down
and grabbed the green one,
watching her from the
corner of my eye. Her face
lit up.

“Good!” she said.

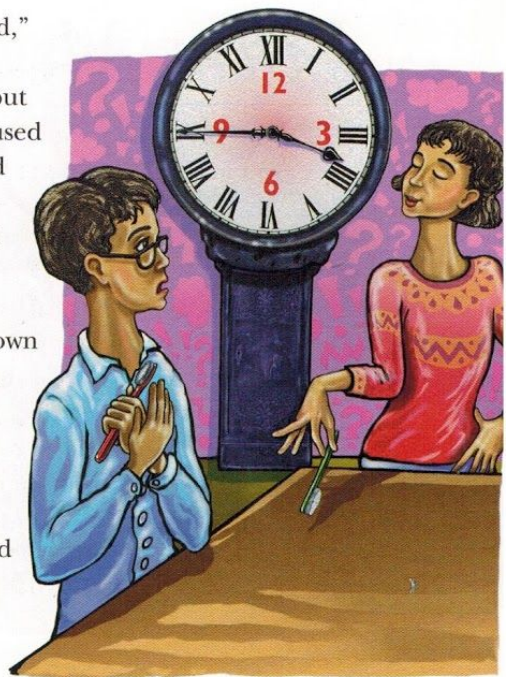
Now I knew. I dropped
the green toothbrush and
grabbed the red one. I
pulled it close to me. This
time I had won.

“Time’s up!” yelled Mom.

I grinned at Deever and waited for her smile to fade.
But it didn’t happen.

She reached out in her dainty way. With two fingers
she plucked the green toothbrush from the table.

“Wonderful!” she said. “Green is my favourite colour.”



AFTER YOU READ

Find similarities and differences

Think of a time when you had an experience similar to Pat's. Make a list of all the things that made your decision difficult and a list of what made Pat's decision difficult. How are your lists the same? different?